

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR WATERMARKING A DIGITAL IMAGE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

I. Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for watermarking a digital image. The invention may be usefully employed in the newly emerging field of digital cinema.

II. Description of the Related Art

[0002] In the traditional film industry, theatre operators receive reels of celluloid film from a studio or through a distributor for eventual presentation in a theatre auditorium. The reels of film include the feature program (a full-length motion picture) and a plurality of previews and other promotional material, often referred to as trailers. This approach is well established and is based in technology going back around one hundred years.

[0003] Recently an evolution has started in the film industry, with the industry moving from celluloid film to digitized image and audio programs. Many advanced technologies are involved and together those technologies are becoming known as digital cinema. It is planned that digital cinema will provide a system for delivering full length motion pictures, trailers, advertisements and other audio/visual programs comprising images and sound at "cinema-quality" to theatres throughout the world using digital technology. Digital cinema will enable the motion picture cinema industry to convert gracefully from the century-old medium of 35mm film into the digital/wireless communication era of today. This advanced technology will benefit all segments of the movie industry.

[0004] The intention is that digital cinema will deliver motion pictures that have been digitized, compressed and encrypted to theatres using either physical media distribution (such as DVD-ROMs) or electronic transmission methods, such as via satellite multicast methods. Authorized theatres will automatically receive the digitized programs and store

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them in hard disk storage while still encrypted and compressed. At each showing, the digitized information will be retrieved via a local area network from the hard disk storage, be decrypted, decompressed and then displayed using cinema-quality electronic projectors featuring high quality digital sound.

[0005] Digital cinema will encompass many advanced technologies, including digital compression, electronic security methods, network architectures and management, transmission technologies and cost-effective hardware, software and integrated circuit design. The technologies necessary for a cost-effective, reliable and secure system are being analyzed and developed. These technologies include new forms of image compression, because most standard compression technologies, such as MPEG- 2, are optimized for television quality. Thus, artifacts and other distortions associated with that technology show up readily when the image is projected on a large screen. Whatever the image compression method adopted, it will affect the eventual quality of the projected image. Special compression systems have therefore been designed specifically for digital cinema applications to provide "cinema-quality" images at bit rates averaging less than 40 Mbps. Using this technology a 2-hour movie will require only about 40 GB of storage, making it suitable for transportation on such media as so-called digital versatile disks (DVDs) or transmission or broadcast via a wireless link.

[0006] While this has obvious advantages in terms of the distribution of movies, it brings with it its own problems in that in itself such transportation and transmission is not secure. Encryption and conditional access methods are therefore also being developed with the aim of preventing piracy of movies. In addition to digital theft, i.e., the theft of a pristine digital copy of the content of the DVDs and/or transmitted data, there is also the problem of optical theft. Optical theft is the recording of the image and audio content of a movie as it is being projected onto the screen of a theater. Optical theft is easy to perform using, for example, little more than a camcorder.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] While there is no sure way of preventing digital or optical theft, it is possible to reduce the likelihood of it occurring by increasing the probability of the perpetrators of the theft being caught. The invention addresses the above-discussed problems associated with digital cinema and is useful in overcoming or at least reducing the problem of digital and optical theft. To this end the invention aims to provide a method and apparatus for inserting an imperceptible watermark or "digital fingerprint" into the image content. The watermark preferably indicates at least one of the location, date and time of showing of the movie, thereby enabling the location date and time of the theft to be determined.

[0008] Although the foregoing introduction and following description concentrate on the insertion of a watermark into an image as the movie is being shown (thereby enabling both optical and digital theft at the theater to be tracked), it will be appreciated by those possessed of the appropriate skills that the same technique could equally well be used in a telecine when original film is converted into digital form (thereby enabling digital and optical theft outside the theater to be tracked). The watermark might for example identify any one or more of the location, date and time of creation of the digital version of the film, the film owner's identity, or copyright information. The technique is applicable to still images as well as moving images.

[0009] According to one aspect of the invention, there is provided an apparatus for applying data representing a watermark to data representing an image, the apparatus comprising: a source of location and time data; an error coding unit connected to receive the location and time data for applying a forward error correction algorithm to the said location and time data and outputting error coded data therefrom; a code spreading unit connected to receive the error coded data for spreading the error coded data to create spread data by repeatedly outputting portions of the error coded data a number of times therefrom; a DES code generator for generating and outputting data representing a DES code; a combiner for combining the spread data and the DES code and outputting watermark data representing a location and time specific watermark; a receiver for receiving signals containing said data representing an image as DCT coefficients in

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transform space, which data is received in an encoded and compressed form on a signal medium, and for receiving an apparatus specific key; a decoding circuit responsive to the apparatus specific key for decoding and decompressing the received signals to recover the data representing an image therefrom; a control circuit for analyzing at least a component of the image data to determine an attribute thereof and to output a signal representative of the attribute; a marking control unit, connected to receive the signal from the control circuit, the image data from the source and the watermark data from the combiner, for adding the watermark data to the image data depending on a characteristic of the attribute and a characteristic of the image data; an inverse DCT transform circuit connected to receive the watermarked image data and to convert the same from data representing the image as DCT coefficients in transformation space to data representing the image in pixel space; a pixel processor connected to receive the data representing the image in pixel space for converting the pixel data into a format suitable for display; and a projector connected to receive formatted pixel data from the pixel processor for projecting the image represented thereby.

[0010] According to another aspect of the invention there is provided an apparatus for applying data representing a watermark to data representing an image, the apparatus comprising: means for supplying location and time data; means for receiving the location and time data, for applying error coding to the said location and time data, and outputting error coded data therefrom; spreading means connected to receive the error coded data for applying a spreading function to the error coded data and outputting spread data therefrom; means for generating and outputting data representing a pseudo-random code; means for combining the spread data and the pseudo-random code and outputting watermark data representing a location and time specific watermark; means for supplying image data representing an image in transformation space; means for analyzing at least a component of the image data to determine an attribute thereof and for outputting a signal representative of the attribute; and marking means, connected to receive the signal representative of the attribute, the image data and the watermark data, for adding the watermark data to the image data depending on a characteristic of the attribute and a characteristic of the image data.

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[0011] According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a method of applying data representing a watermark to data representing an image, the method comprising: supplying location and time data; applying a forward error correction algorithm to the said location and time data to produce error coded data; applying a spreading function to the error coded data to create spread data by repeating portions of the error coded data a number of times; generating data representing a DES code; combining the spread data and the DES code to create watermark data representing a location and time specific watermark; receiving signals containing said data representing an image as DCT coefficients in transform space, which data is received in an encoded and compressed form on a signal medium; receiving an apparatus specific key; decoding and decompressing the received signals responsive to the apparatus specific key to recover the data representing an image therefrom; analyzing at least a component of the image data to determine an attribute thereof and to create a signal representative of the attribute; adding the watermark data to the image data depending on a characteristic of the attribute and a characteristic of the image data; and converting the watermarked image data from data representing the image as DCT coefficients in transformation space to data representing the image in pixel space; converting the pixel data into a format suitable for display; and projecting the image represented by the formatted pixel data.

[0012] According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method of applying data representing a watermark to data representing an image, the method comprising: supplying location and time data; applying error coding to the said location and time data to produce error coded data; applying a spreading function to the error coded data to produce spread data; generating data representing a pseudo-random code; combining the spread data and the pseudo-random code to produce watermark data representing a location and time specific watermark; supplying image data representing an image in transformation space; analyzing at least a component of the image data to determine an attribute thereof to produce a signal representative of the attribute; and adding the watermark data to the image data depending on a characteristic of the attribute and a characteristic of the image data.

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[0013] The invention also provides an apparatus for adding a watermark to a moving image as it is displayed, the apparatus comprising: a watermark generator in which data representing a watermark is generated containing first information pertaining to the displaying of the moving image and protected by forward error encoding and second information pertaining to the displaying of the moving image and protected by scrambling; and a watermark applicator for applying the watermark data to image data representing substantially all of the moving image depending on a characteristic of the data.

[0014] The invention further provides a watermarking system for applying data representing a moving image to produce watermarked image data which is output to a display device for display of the moving image represented thereby, in which system information identifying at least one of the system, the image and the displaying of the image is convolutionally encoded and spread and information identifying at least one of the system, the image and the displaying of the image is encrypted so as to produce the watermark data which is applied to substantially all data representing the moving image with the exception of data having a value below a determined level in order to minimize the introduction of visible noise and other artifacts into the image by the watermark.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0015] The above and further features of the invention are set forth with particularity in the appended claims and together with advantages thereof will become clearer from consideration of the following detailed description of an exemplary embodiment of the invention given with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0016] Figure 1 illustrates a block diagram of a digital cinema system;

[0017] Figure 2 is a block diagram of a compressor/encryptor circuit used in the system of Figure 1;

[0018] Figure 3 illustrates an auditorium module used in the system of Figure 1;

[0019] Figure 4 is a block diagram representing parts of an encryption/decryption unit for applying watermarks to image data;

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[0020] Figure 5 is a block diagram representing a watermark unit of the encryption/decryption unit of Figure 4; and

[0021] Figure 6 is a block diagram representing a theater manager and its associated interfaces used in the system of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AN EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

[0022] The following description is intended to provide both an overview of a digital cinema system in which the invention may be embodied and a detailed disclosure of the presently preferred embodiment itself. Systems similar to the system shown herein are described extensively in other applications assigned to the assignee of this application, including USSN 09/564,174, entitled, "Apparatus And Method For Encoding And Storage Of Digital Image And Audio Signals" and USSN 09/563,880, entitled, "Apparatus And Method For Decoding Digital Image And Audio Signals" both filed May 3, 2000, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0023] A digital cinema system 100 embodying the invention is illustrated in Figure 1 of the accompanying drawings. The digital cinema system 100 comprises two main systems: at least one central facility or hub 102 and at least one presentation or theater subsystem 104. The hub 102 and the theater subsystem 104 are of a similar design to that of pending US Patent Application Serial No. 09/075,152, filed on May 8, 1998, assigned to the same assignee as the present invention, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0024] Image and audio information are compressed and stored on a storage medium, and distributed from the hub 102 to the theater subsystem 104. Generally, one theater subsystem 104 is utilized for each theater or presentation location in a network of presentation locations that is to receive image or audio information, and includes some centralized equipment as well as certain equipment employed for each presentation auditorium.

[0025] In the central hub 102, a source generator 108 receives film material and generates a digital version of the film. The digital information is compressed and encrypted by a compressor/encryptor (CE) 112, and stored on a storage medium by a hub

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storage device **116**. A network manager **120** monitors and sends control information to the source generator **108**, the CE **112**, and the hub storage device **116**. A conditional access manager **124** provides specific electronic keying information such that only specific theaters are authorized to show specific programs.

[0026] In the theater subsystem **104**, a theater manager **128** controls an auditorium module **132**. Based on control information received from the auditorium module **132**, a theater storage device **136** transfers compressed information stored on the storage medium to a playback module **140**. The playback module **140** receives the compressed information from the theater storage device **136**, and prepares the compressed information to a predetermined sequence, size and data rate. The playback module **140** outputs the compressed information to a decoder **144**. The decoder **144** inputs compressed information from the playback module **140** and performs decryption, decompression and formatting, and outputs the information to a projector **148** and a sound module **152**. The projector **148** plays the information on a projector and the sound module **152** plays sound information on a sound system, both under control of the auditorium module **132**.

[0027] In operation, the source generator **108** provides digitized electronic image and/or programs to the system. Typically, the source generator **108** receives film material and generates a magnetic tape containing digitized information or data. The film is digitally scanned at a very high resolution to create the digitized version of the motion picture or other program. Typically, a known "telecine" process generates the image information while well-known digital audio conversion processing generates the audio portion of the program. The images being processed need not be provided from a film, but can be single picture or still frame type images, or a series of frames or pictures, including those shown as motion pictures of varying length. These images can be presented as a series or set to create what are referred to as image programs. In addition, other material can be provided such as visual cue tracks for sight-impaired audiences, subtitling for foreign language and/or hearing impaired audiences, or multimedia time cue tracks. Similarly, single or sets of sounds or recordings are used to form desired audio programs.

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[0028] Alternatively, a high definition digital camera or other known digital image generation device or method may provide the digitized image information. The use of a digital camera, which directly produces the digitized image information, is especially useful for live event capture for substantially immediate or contemporaneous distribution. Computer workstations or similar equipment can also be used to directly generate graphical images that are to be distributed.

[0029] The digital image information or program is presented to the compressor/encryptor **112**, which compresses the digital signal using a preselected known format or process, reducing the amount of digital information necessary to reproduce the original image with very high quality. Preferably, an ABSDCT technique is used to compress the image source. A suitable ABSDCT compression technique is disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,021,891, 5,107,345, and 5,452,104, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference. The audio information may also be digitally compressed using standard techniques and may be time synchronized with the compressed image information. The compressed image and audio information is then encrypted and/or scrambled using one or more secure electronic methods.

[0030] The network manager **120** monitors the status of compressor/encryptor **112**, and directs the compressed information from the compressor/encryptor **112** to the hub storage device **116**. The hub storage device **116** is comprised of one or more storage. The storage medium/media may be any type of high capacity data storage device including, but not limited to, one or more digital versatile disks (DVDs) or removable hard drives (RHDs). Upon storage of the compressed information onto the storage medium, the storage medium is physically transported to the theater subsystem **104**, and more specifically, to the theater storage device **136**.

[0031] Alternatively, the compressed image and audio information may each be stored in a non-contiguous or separate manner independent of each other. That is, a means is provided for compressing and storing audio programs associated with image information or programs but segregated in time. There is no requirement to process the audio images at the same time. A predefined identifier or identification mechanism or scheme is used to associate corresponding audio and image programs with each other, as appropriate.

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This allows linking of one or more preselected audio programs with at least one preselected image program, as desired, at a time of presentation, or during a presentation event. That is, while not initially time synchronized with the compressed image information, the compressed audio is linked and synchronized at presentation of the program.

[0032] Further, maintaining the audio program separate from the image program allows for synchronizing multiple languages from audio programs to the image program, without having to recreate the image program for each language. Moreover, maintaining a separate audio program allows for support of multiple speaker configurations without requiring interleaving of multiple audio tracks with the image program.

[0033] In addition to the image program and the audio program, a separate promotional program, or promo program, may be added to the system. Typically, promotional material changes at a greater frequency than the feature program. Use of a separate promo program allows promotional material to be updated without requiring new feature image programs. The promo program comprises information such as advertising (slides, audio, motion or the like) and trailers shown in the theater. Because of the high storage capacity of storage media such as DVDs and RHDs, thousands of slides or pieces of advertising may be stored. The high storage volume allows for customization, as specific slides, advertisements or trailers may be shown at specific theaters to targeted customers.

[0034] Although Figure 1 illustrates the compressed information in the storage device 116 and physically transporting storage medium/media to the theater subsystem 104, it should be understood that the compressed information, or portions thereof, may be transmitted to the theater storage device 136 using any of a number wireless or wired transmission methods. Transmission methods include satellite transmission, well-known multi-drop, Internet access nodes, dedicated telephone lines, or point-to-point fiber optic networks.

[0035] A block diagram of the compressor/encryptor 112 is illustrated in Figure 2 of the accompanying drawings. Similar to the source generator 108, the compressor/encryptor 112 may be part of the central hub 102 or located in a separate facility. For example, the compressor/encryptor 112 may be located with the source generator 108 in a film or

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television production studio. In addition, the compression process for either image or audio information or data may be implemented as a variable rate process.

[0036] The compressor/encryptor **112** receives a digital image and audio information provided by the source generator **108**. The digital image and audio information may be stored in frame buffers (not shown) before further processing. The digital image signal is passed to an image compressor **184**. In a preferred embodiment, the image compressor **184** processes a digital image signal using the ABSDCT technique described in the abovementioned U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,021,891, 5,107,345, and 5,452,104.

[0037] In the ABSDCT technique, the color input signal is generally in a YIQ format, with Y being the luminance, or brightness, component, and I and Q being the chrominance, or color, components. Other formats such as the YUV, YC_bC_r, or RGB formats may also be used. Because of the low spatial sensitivity of the eye to color, the ABSDCT technique sub-samples the color (I and Q) components by a factor of two in each of the horizontal and vertical directions. Accordingly, four luminance components and two chrominance components are used to represent each spatial segment of image input. The ABS DCT Technique also supports a format called 4:4:4 where no nonsampling of chrominance component takes place. Pixels in each component are represented digitally in up to 10 bits linear or log scale.

[0038] Each of the luminance and chrominance components is passed to a block interleaver. Generally, a 16x16 block is presented to the block interleaver, which orders the image samples within the 16x16 blocks to produce blocks and composite sub-blocks of data for discrete cosine transform (DCT) analysis. The DCT operator is one method of converting a time-sampled signal to a frequency representation of the same signal. By converting to a frequency representation, the DCT techniques have been shown to allow for very high levels of compression, as quantizers can be designed to take advantage of the frequency distribution characteristics of an image. Preferably, one 16x16 DCT is applied to a first ordering, four 8x8 DCTs are applied to a second ordering, 16 4x4 DCTs are applied to a third ordering, and 64 2x2 DCTs are applied to a fourth ordering.

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[0039] The DCT operation reduces the spatial redundancy inherent in the image source. After the DCT is performed, most of the image signal energy tends to be concentrated in a few DCT coefficients.

[0040] For the 16x16 block and each sub-block, the transformed coefficients are analyzed to determine the number of bits required to encode the block or sub-block. Then, the block or the combination of sub-blocks, which requires the least number of bits to encode, is chosen to represent the image segment. For example, two 8x8 sub-blocks, six 4x4 sub-blocks, and eight 2x2 sub-blocks may be chosen to represent the image segment.

[0041] The chosen block or combination of sub-blocks is then properly arranged in order. The DCT coefficient values may then undergo further processing such as, but not limited to, frequency weighting, quantization, and coding (such as variable length coding) using known techniques, in preparation for transmission. The compressed image signal is then provided to at least one image encryptor **188**.

[0042] The digital audio signal is generally passed to an audio compressor **192**. Preferably, the audio compressor **192** processes multi-channel audio information using a standard digital audio compression algorithm. The compressed audio signal is provided to at least one audio encryptor **196**. Alternatively, the audio information may be transferred and utilized in an uncompressed, but still digital, format.

[0043] The image encryptor **188** and the audio encryptor **196** encrypts the compressed image and audio signals, respectively, using any of a number of known encryption techniques. The image and audio signals may be encrypted using the same or different techniques. In a preferred embodiment, an encryption technique, which comprises real-time digital sequence scrambling of both image and audio programming, is used.

[0044] At the image and audio encryptors **188** and **196**, the programming material is processed by a scrambler/encryptor circuit that uses time-varying electronic keying information (typically changed several times per second). The scrambled program information can then be stored or transmitted, such as over the air in a wireless link, without being decipherable to anyone who does not possess the associated electronic keying information used to scramble the program material or digital data.

[0045] Encryption generally involves digital sequence scrambling or direct encryption of the compressed signal. The words "encryption" and "scrambling" are used interchangeably and are understood to mean any means of processing digital data streams of various sources using any of a number of cryptographic techniques to scramble, cover, or directly encrypt said digital streams using sequences generated using secret digital values ("keys") in such a way that it is very difficult to recover the original data sequence without knowledge of the secret key values.

[0046] Each image or audio program may use specific electronic keying information which is provided, encrypted by presentation-location or theater-specific electronic keying information, to theaters or presentation locations authorized to show that specific program. The conditional access manager (CAM) **124** handles this function. The encrypted program key needed by the auditorium to decrypt the stored information is transmitted, or otherwise delivered, to the authorized theaters prior to playback of the program. Note that the stored program information may potentially be transmitted days or weeks before the authorized showing period begins, and that the encrypted image or audio program key may be transmitted or delivered just before the authorized playback period begins. The encrypted program key may also be transferred using a low data rate link, or a transportable storage element such as a magnetic or optical media disk, a smart card, or other devices having erasable memory elements. The encrypted program key may also be provided in such a way as to control the period of time for which a specific theater complex or auditorium is authorized to show the program.

[0047] Each theater subsystem **104** that receives an encrypted program key decrypts this value using its auditorium specific key, and stores this decrypted program key in a memory device or other secured memory. When the program is to be played back, the theater or location specific and program specific keying information is used, preferably with a symmetric algorithm, that was used in the encryptor **112** in preparing the encrypted signal to now descramble/decrypt program information in real-time.

[0048] Returning now to Figure 2, in addition to scrambling, the image encryptor **188** may add a "watermark" or "fingerprint" which is usually digital in nature, to the image programming. This involves the insertion of a location specific and/or time specific

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visual identifier into the program sequence. That is, the watermark is constructed to indicate the authorized location and time for presentation, for more efficiently tracking the source of illicit copying when necessary. The watermark may be programmed to appear at frequent, but pseudo-random periods in the playback process and would not be visible to the viewing audience. The watermark is perceptually unnoticeable during presentation of decompressed image or audio information at what is predefined as a normal rate of transfer. However, the watermark is detectable when the image or audio information is presented at a rate substantially different from that normal rate, such as at a slower "non-real-time" or still frame playback rate. If an unauthorized copy of a program is recovered, the digital watermark information can be read by authorities, and the theater from which the copy was made can be determined. Such a watermark technique may also be applied or used to identify the audio programs.

[0049] The compressed and encrypted image and audio signals are both presented to a multiplexer **200**. At the multiplexer **200**, the image and audio information is multiplexed together along with time synchronization information to allow the image and audio-streamed information to be played back in a time aligned manner at the theater subsystem **104**. The multiplexed signal is then processed by a program packetizer **204**, which packetizes the data to form the program stream. By packetizing the data, or forming "data blocks," the program stream may be monitored during decompression at the theater subsystem **104** (see Figure 1) for errors in receiving the blocks during decompression. Requests may be made by the theater manager **128** of the theater subsystem **104** to acquire data blocks exhibiting errors. Accordingly, if errors exist, only small portions of the program need to be replaced, instead of an entire program. Requests of small blocks of data may be handled over a wired or wireless link. This provides for increased reliability and efficiency.

[0050] Alternatively, the image and audio portions of a program are treated as separate and distinct programs. Thus, instead of using the multiplexer **200** to multiplex the image and audio signals, the image signals are separately packetized. In this way the image program may be transported exclusive of the audio program, and vice versa. As such, the image and audio programs are assembled into combined programs only at playback time.

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This allows for different audio programs to be combined with image programs for various reasons, such as varying languages, providing post-release updates or program changes, to fit within local community standards, and so forth. This ability to flexibly assign audio different multi-track programs to image programs is very useful for minimizing costs in altering programs already in distribution, and in addressing the larger multi-cultural markets now available to the film industry.

[0051] The compressors **184** and **192**, the encryptors **188** and **196**, the multiplexer **200**, and the program packetizer **204** may be implemented by a compression/encryption module (CEM) controller **208**, a software-controlled processor programmed to perform the functions described herein. That is, they can be configured as generalized function hardware including a variety of programmable electronic devices or computers that operate under software or firmware program control. They may alternatively be implemented using some other technology, such as through an ASIC or through one or more circuit card assemblies, i.e., constructed as specialized hardware.

[0052] The image and audio program stream is sent to the hub storage device **116**. The CEM controller **208** is primarily responsible for controlling and monitoring the entire compressor/encryptor **112**. The CEM controller **208** may be implemented by programming a general-purpose hardware device or computer to perform the required functions, or by using specialized hardware. Network control is provided to CEM controller **208** from the network manager **120** (Figure 2) over a hub internal network, as described herein. The CEM controller **208** communicates with the compressors **184** and **192**, the encryptors **188** and **196**, the multiplexer **200**, and the packetizer **204** using a known digital interface and controls the operation of these elements. The CEM controller **208** may also control and monitor the storage module **116**, and the data transfer between these devices.

[0053] The storage device **116** is preferably constructed as one or more RHDs, DVDs disks or other high capacity storage medium/media, which in general is of similar design as the theater storage device **116** in theater subsystem **104**. However, those skilled in the art will recognize that in some applications other media may be used including but not limited to DVDs (Digital Versatile Disks) or so-called JBODs ("Just a Bunch Of

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Operation of the storage device **116** is managed by the CEM controller **208**.

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[0056] The portions of compressed information is output from the FIFO-RAM buffer into a network interface **288**, which provides the compressed information to the decoder **144**. Preferably, the network interface **288** is a fiber channel arbitrated loop (FC-AL) interface. Alternatively, although not specifically illustrated, a switch network

controlled by the theater manager **128** receives the output data from the playback module **140** and directs the data to a given decoder **144**. Use of the switch network allows programs on any given playback module **140** to be transferred to any given decoder **144**.

[0057] When a program is to be viewed, the program information is retrieved from the storage device **136** and transferred to the auditorium module **132** via the theater manager **128**. The decoder **144** decrypts the data received from the storage device **136** using secret key information provided only to authorized theaters, and decompresses the stored information using the decompression algorithm which is inverse to the compression algorithm used at source generator **108**. The decoder **144** includes a converter (not shown in Figure 3) which converts the decompressed image information to an image display format used by the projection system (which may be either an analog or digital format) and the image is displayed through an electronic projector **148**. The audio information is also decompressed and provided to the auditorium's sound system **152** for playback with the image program.

[0058] The decoder **144** will now be described in greater detail by further reference to Figure 3. The decoder **144** processes a compressed/encrypted program to be visually projected onto a screen or surface and audibly presented using the sound system **152**. The decoder **144** comprises a controlling CPU (central processing unit) **312**, which controls the decoder. Alternatively, the decoder may be controlled via the theater manager **128**. The decoder further comprises at least one depacketizer **316**, a buffer **314**, an image decryptor/decompressor **320**, and an audio decryptor/decompressor **324**. The buffer may temporarily store information for the depacketizer **316**. All of the above-identified units of the decoder **144** may be implemented on one or more circuit card assemblies. The circuit card assemblies may be installed in a self-contained enclosure that mounts on or adjacent to the projector **148**. Additionally, a cryptographic smart card **328** may be used which interfaces with controlling CPU **312** and/or image decryptor/decompressor **320** for transfer and storage of unit-specific cryptographic keying information.

[0059] The depacketizer **316** identifies and separates the individual control, image, and audio packets that arrive from the playback module **140**, the CPU **312** and/or the theater

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manager **128**. Control packets may be sent to the theater manager **128** while the image and audio packets are sent to the image and audio decryption/decompression systems **320** and **324**, respectively. Read and write operations tend to occur in bursts. Therefore, the buffer **314** is used to stream data smoothly from the depacketizer **316** to the projection equipment.

[0060] The theater manager **128** configures, manages the security of, operates, and monitors the theater subsystem **104**. This includes the external interfaces, image and audio decryption/decompression modules **320** and **324**, along with projector **148** and the sound system module **152**. Control information comes from the playback module **140**, the CPU **312**, the theater manager system **128**, a remote control port, or a local control input, such as a control panel on the outside of the auditorium module **132** housing or chassis. The decoder CPU **312** may also manage the electronic keys assigned to each auditorium module **132**. Pre-selected electronic cryptographic keys assigned to auditorium module **132** are used in conjunction with the electronic cryptographic key information that is embedded in the image and audio data to decrypt the image and audio information before the decompression process. Preferably, the CPU **312** uses a standard microprocessor running embedded in the software of each auditorium module **132**, as a basic functional or control element.

[0061] In addition, the CPU **312** is preferably configured to work or communicate certain information with theater manager **128** to maintain a history of presentations occurring in each auditorium. Information regarding this presentation history is then available for transfer to the hub **102** using the return link, or through a transportable medium at preselected times.

[0062] The image decryptor/decompressor **320** takes the image data stream from depacketizer **316**, performs decryption, adds a watermark and reassembles the original image for presentation on the screen. The output of this operation generally provides standard analog RGB signals to digital cinema projector **148**. Typically, decryption and decompression are performed in real-time, allowing for real-time playback of the programming material.

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[0063] The image decryptor/decompressor **320** decrypts and decompresses the image data stream to reverse the operation performed by the image compressor **184** and the image encryptor **188** of the hub **102**. Each auditorium module **132** may process and display a different program from other auditorium modules **132** in the same theater subsystem **104** or one or more auditorium modules **132** may process and display the same program simultaneously. Optionally, the same program may be displayed on multiple projectors, the multiple projectors being delayed in time relative to each other.

[0064] The decryption process uses previously provided unit-specific and program-specific electronic cryptographic key information in conjunction with the electronic keys embedded in the data stream to decrypt the image information. Each theater subsystem **104** is provided with the necessary cryptographic key information for all programs authorized to be shown on each auditorium module **132**.

[0065] A multi-level cryptographic key manager is used to authorize specific presentation systems for display of specific programs. This multi-level key manager typically utilizes electronic key values which are specific to each authorized theater manager **128**, the specific image and/or audio program, and/or a time varying cryptographic key sequence within the image and/or audio program. An "auditorium specific" electronic key, typically 56 bits or longer, is programmed into each auditorium module **132**.

[0066] This programming may be implemented using several techniques to transfer and present the key information for use. For example, the return link discussed above may be used through a link to transfer the cryptographic information from the conditional access manager **124**. Alternatively, smart card technology such as smart card **328**, pre-programmed flash memory cards, and other known portable storage devices may be used.

[0067] For example, the smart card **328** may be designed so that this value, once loaded into the card, cannot be read from the smart card memory.

[0068] Physical and electronic security measures are used to prevent tampering with this key information and to detect attempted tampering or compromise. The key is stored in such a way that it can be erased in the event of detected tampering attempts. The smart card circuitry includes a microprocessor core including a software implementation of an

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encryption algorithm, typically Data Encryption Standard (DES). The smart card can input values provided to it, encrypt (or decrypt) these values using the on-card DES algorithm and the pre-stored auditorium specific key, and output the result.

Alternatively, the smart card **328** may be used simply to transfer encrypted electronic keying information to circuitry in the theater subsystem **104** which would perform the processing of this key information for use by the image and audio decryption processes.

[0069] Image program data streams undergo dynamic image decompression using an inverse ABSDCT algorithm or other image decompression process symmetric to the image compression used in the central hub compressor/encryptor **112**. If image compression is based on the ABSDCT algorithm the decompression process includes variable length decoding, inverse frequency weighting, inverse quantization, inverse differential quad-tree transformation, IDCT, and DCT block combiner deinterleaving. The processing elements used for decompression may be implemented in dedicated specialized hardware configured for this function such as an ASIC or one or more circuit card assemblies. Alternatively, the decompression processing elements may be implemented as standard elements or generalized hardware including a variety of digital signal processors or programmable electronic devices or computers that operate under the control of special function software or firmware programming. Multiple ASICs may be implemented to process the image information in parallel to support high image data rates.

[0070] Digital watermarks are applied to the image data before the image is output for display by the projector. The watermarks are applied by the image decryptor/decompressor **320** before the data is output to the projector **148** for display of the image that it represents.

[0071] Referring now to Figure **4** of the accompanying drawings, relevant parts of the decryptor/decompressor **320** for applying a watermark to the image are shown therein. The decryptor/decompressor **320** comprises a compressed data interface (CDI) **401**, which receives the depacketised, compressed and encrypted data from the depacketiser **316** (see Figure **3**). Data tends to be moved around and processed in bursts, and so the received data is stored in a random access store **402**, which is preferably an SDRAM

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device or similar, until it is needed. The data input to the SDRAM store **402** corresponds to compressed and encrypted versions of the image data. The store **402**, therefore, need not be very large (relatively speaking) to be able to store data corresponding to a large number of image frames.

[0072] From time to time, the data is taken from the store **402** by the CDI **401** and output to a decryption circuit **403** where it is decrypted using a DES (Data Encryption Standard) key. The DES key is specific to the encryption performed at the central facility **102** (see Figure 1) and, therefore, enables the incoming data to be decrypted. The data may also be compressed before it is transmitted from the central facility, using lossless techniques including Huffman or run-length encoding and/or lossy techniques including block quantization in which the value of the data in a block is divided by a power of 2 (i.e., 2 or 4 or 8, etc). The decryptor/decompressor **320** thus comprises a decompressor, e.g., an inverse quantization block (Huffman/IQB) decompressor **404** that decompresses the decrypted data. The decompressed data from the Huffman/IQB decompressor **404** represents the image data in the DCT domain.

[0073] Since the system already comprises the necessary hardware and software to effect DCT compression techniques, specifically the above-mentioned ABSDCT compression technique, to compress data, the same is used to embed a watermark into the picture in the DCT domain. Other transformations could, of course, be used but since the hardware is already there in the system this offers the most cost-effective solution.

[0074] Data from the decompressor **404** is, therefore, input to a watermark processor **405** where a watermark is applied in a manner that will be described in greater detail herein below. The data from the watermark processor **405** is then input to an inverse DCT transforming circuit **406** where the data is converted from the DCT domain into image data in the pixel domain.

[0075] The thus produced pixel data is input to a frame buffer interface **407** and associated SDRAM store **408**. The frame buffer interface **407** and associated store **408** serves as a buffer in which the pixel data is held for reconstruction in a suitable format for display of the image by a pixel image processor **409**. The SDRAM store **408** may be of a similar size to that of the SDRAM store **402** associated with the compressed data

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interface **401**. However, since the data input to the frame buffer interface **407** represents the image in the pixel domain, data for only a comparatively small number of image frames can be stored in the SDRAM store **408**. This is not a problem because the purpose of the frame buffer interface **407** is simply to reorder the data from the inverse DCT circuit and present it for reformatting by the pixel image processor **409** at the display rate.

[0076] The decompressed image data goes through digital to analog conversion, and the analog signals are output to projector **148** for display of the image represented by the image data. The projector **148** presents the electronic representation of a program on a screen. The high quality projector is based on advanced technology, such as liquid crystal light valve (LCLV) methods for processing optical or image information. The projector **148** receives an image signal from image decryptor/decompressor **320**, typically in standard Red-Green-Blue (RGB) video signal format. Alternatively, a digital interface may be used to convey the decompressed digital image data to the projector **148** obviating the need for the digital-to-analog process. Information transfer for control and monitoring of the projector **148** is typically provided over a digital serial interface from the controller **312**.

[0077] Figure 5 of the accompanying drawings shows the watermark processor **405** in greater detail. The watermark processor **405** is a configurable coefficient modulator in which registers store the watermark identification information and decisions are made on which reels to mark and how heavily.

[0078] The watermark processor **405** embeds an imperceptible projector identification code and time stamp into consecutive frames of video before the data is output to the projector for display. This identification coding is able to withstand basic image manipulations such as resolution scaling and cropping. More involved attacks, such as inter-frame averaging, collusion of segments from multiple sources, and image warping, are possible but beyond the resources of the casual video pirate. The watermarking information is inserted into the video data in such a way that all information contained in the watermark is readable during any contiguous segment of the motion image program of no more than five minutes in duration.

[0079] The watermark processor **405** employs a DES engine that is keyed to the program key. This serves three purposes. Firstly, the watermark pattern cannot be predicted because the sequence is tied to a non-linear noise generator. Secondly, the watermark is specific to the individual program and ensures the pirate cannot tamper with it, despite having compromised another program or being aware of the watermark technique. Thirdly, the watermark is imperceptible because it is masked in a noise-like random sequence, i.e., the code generated by the DES engine.

[0080] It is assumed that a video pirate will know that the movie material he is stealing will contain a watermark of some origin. He may not be able to perceive it or strip it from the image, but he may be able to alter it using some or all of the following methods.

[0081] Basic manipulations such as resolution scaling and cropping occur when the program is recorded onto a video camera or similar device. The digital cinema display format can be as large as 2560 x 1088; most consumer equipment is limited to a maximum of 800 x 600 pixels (SVHS). This implies a resolution scaling operation and possibly also a cropping operation. The video pirate may decide to capture the entire width of the image (letterbox format) or a fraction of it (pan and scan).

[0082] Complex manipulations such as inter-frame averaging occur when two video frames from the same scene are used to average out the areas that have been watermarked. One form of this inter-frame averaging could occur when the charge-coupled device (CCD) in a video camera converts the 24 or 30 fps of the projector into its internal refresh rate.

[0083] Another complex manipulation attack can occur when the same program sequence is captured from different projectors with different watermark identification codes. The sets of frames can be compared to identify which portions of a frame are marked and average those out. A variation on this scheme, collusion, uses two copies of the program to identify marked portions and then modifies them to fabricate a false signature of a third copy. A further complex manipulation, image warping, involves using a geometric transformation on every frame. Under this scheme, image bits are moved slightly to new positions so that the image appears untouched, but the watermark detector cannot locate the bits.

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[0084] The watermark processor **405** comprises a number of registers **421** to **425** that hold variables used in the watermarking process. Registers **421** and **422** hold data respectively identifying the projector (which one and in which theatre) and the time of display of the program. The projector identity data and the time stamp data are input to an error correction unit **427** where forward error correction, i.e., convolutional coding, is applied. The error corrected data from the correction unit **427** is input to a spreading block **429** together with a spreading factor from the register **423**. The spreading block **429** spreads the bits from the correction unit **427** so as to make the watermarking data more robust against short-period manipulations. The spreading function performed by the spreading block **429** may, for example, duplicate each input bit a number of times before moving on to the next bit. This enables the data to be spread within a frame with the code changing on a frame-by-frame basis, or to be spread over several frames with the code changing after a predetermined number of frames.

[0085] The watermark processor **405** also comprises a DES engine **432**. The DES engine **432** generates DES codes entirely independently of the DES codes used by the DES decryption unit **403** (see Figure 4). The DES key used by the DES decryption unit **403** pertains to the encryption and decryption of the data from the central facility (see Figure 1) whereas the DES key generated by the DES engine **432** is specific to the theater and/or the projector I which the movie is displayed.

[0086] The DES engine **432** is used to generate a pseudo-random noise (PN) sequence for embedding the watermark data into the movie bits. A program key is loaded from register **424** into the DES engine **432** at the start of the program and used throughout the program. At the beginning of each frame, the initial vector is loaded with the current frame number. The DES engine **432** is configured in output feedback mode. In this manner, a long-period PN sequence is generated that is unique for every frame of every program. The thus generated long PN sequence is output to an exclusive-OR (XOR) combiner **433** where it is combined on a bit-by-bit basis with the data from the spreading block **429**.

[0087] An amplitude control block **434** identifies the level at which each DCT coefficient is marked. Amplitude control is accomplished by determining the magnitude of each

DCT coefficient and using the magnitude of the DCT coefficients to index data in a look-up table. The magnitude of the coefficient is determined as \log_2 of the absolute coefficient value. The DCT transform domain has the advantage that watermarks are adaptable because the strength of the watermark depends on the intensity values of the DCT coefficients of the original image. The watermark is made strong in the DCT coefficients with large intensity values and is attenuated in areas with small DCT values.

[0088] Although any color component may be used, Figure 5 illustrates only DCT coefficients for the luminance (Y) component of the image are input to the amplitude control block 434 (and indeed to the watermark processor 405). In this embodiment, the DCT coefficients relating to the color different components (C_R and C_B) of the image bypass the watermark processor 405 entirely. This is because the color difference components (C_R and C_B) by themselves cannot be used to produce a meaningful image but the luminance (Y) component may be used to create a black-and-white version of the image. Processing the DCT coefficients for the Y component reduces processing overheads. In another embodiment, the C_R and/or C_B components are input to the watermark processor.

[0089] The amplitude control block 434 produces an amplitude value that is passed to a marking control block 436. The marking control block 436 controls the actual selection of the components to mark. It decides which DCT coefficients are marked and in what types of sub-blocks. Any block size (16x16, 8x8, 4x4, 2x2) may be marked, whether the block is deemed perceptually significant or not. In an embodiment, both perceptually significant and other blocks are marked. In another embodiment, perceptually significant blocks are not marked. The marking control block 436 converts the watermark value from the XOR combiner 433 into a negative value (-1) if the watermark bit is a zero (0) and into a positive value (+1) if the watermark bit is a one (1). The marking control block 436 also decides whether or not the watermark data will actually be incorporated into the DCT coefficients for the luminance component. To this end the marking control block examines the value of the coefficient and/or the amplitude value from the amplitude control block together with other information (including block size) pertaining to the DCT coefficients. Generally, watermarking is not applied to coefficients whose

\log_2 value is zero since this may introduce a noise into the image. Such noise would probably be visible in the image and is therefore unacceptable. When watermarking is to be applied the positive (+1) or negative (-1) value is added to the luminance (Y) data.

[0090] The data output from the marking control block **436** are input to an adder **438** where they are added to the DCT coefficients for the luminance component of the image. In this way, the watermark data is applied to the image data while still in the DCT domain. Apart from the DC components, all DCT coefficients are considered as candidates for the application of watermark data. The data is applied depending on among other things the amplitude of a coefficient. The application of watermarking data to a DCT coefficient will have an effect on an area in the image since each DCT coefficient contributes to several pixels in the image. It follows, therefore, that the watermarking is applied to substantially the whole of the image and not just selected portions of it. This tends to make the watermarking more robust to such attacks as those discussed herein above.

[0091] Those possessed of the appropriate skills will appreciate from the foregoing that the watermark is constructed to indicate the authorized location and time for presentation, for more efficiently tracking the source of illicit copying when necessary. The watermark may appear at frequent, but deterministic periods in the playback process and is not visible to the viewing audience. The watermark is perceptually unnoticeable during presentation of decompressed image or audio information at what is predefined as a normal rate of transfer. However, the watermark may be detectable, although not perceptible, when the image or audio information is presented at a rate substantially different from that normal rate, such as at a slower "non-real-time" or still frame playback rate. If an unauthorized copy of a program is recovered, the digital watermark information can be read by authorities, and the theater from which the copy was made can be determined.

[0092] The watermarked DCT data thus produced by the watermarking processor **405** is input to the inverse DCT unit **406** where it is converted into pixel data as has already been explained herein with reference to Figure 4. Thus, the decryptor/decompressor **320** serves to decrypt the incoming data, decompress it, apply a watermark, convert the data

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from the DCT domain to the pixel domain and reconstruct the pixels into a suitable format for display of the image by the projector **148**.

[0093] The audio decryptor/decompressor **324** shown in Figure **3** operates in a similar manner on the audio data, although it does not apply data representing a watermark or fingerprint to the audio signal. Of course such a watermark technique may also be applied or used to identify the audio programs, if desired. The audio decryptor/decompressor **324** takes the audio data stream from the depacketizer **316**, performs decryption, and reassembles the original audio for presentation on a theater's speakers or audio sound system **152**. The output of this operation provides standard line level audio signals to the sound system **152**.

[0094] Similar to the image decryptor/decompressor **320**, the audio decryptor/decompressor **324** reverses the operation performed by the audio compressor **192** and the audio encryptor **196** of the hub **102**. Using electronic keys from the cryptographic smart card **328** in conjunction with the electronic keys embedded in the data stream, the decryptor **324** decrypts the audio information. The decrypted audio data is then decompressed.

[0095] Audio decompression is performed with an algorithm symmetric to that used at the central hub **102** for audio compression. Multiple audio channels, if present, are decompressed. The number of audio channels is dependent on the multi-phonetic sound system design of the particular auditorium, or presentation system. Additional audio channels may be transmitted from the central hub **102** for enhanced audio programming for purposes such as multi-language audio tracks and audio cues for sight impaired audiences. The system may also provide additional data tracks synchronized to the image programs for purposes such as multimedia special effects tracks, subtitling, and special visual cue tracks for hearing impaired audiences.

[0096] As discussed earlier, audio and data tracks may be time synchronized to the image programs or may be presented asynchronously without direct time synchronization. Image programs may consist of single frames (i.e., still images), a sequence of single frame still images, or motion image sequences of short or long duration.

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[0097] If necessary, the audio channels are provided to an audio delay element, which inserts a delay as needed to synchronize the audio with the appropriate image frame. Each channel then goes through a digital to analog conversion to provide what are known as "line level" outputs to sound system **152**. That is, the appropriate analog level or format signals are generated from the digital data to drive the appropriate sound system. The line level audio outputs typically use standard XLR or AES/EBU connectors found in most theater sound systems.

[0098] Referring back to Figure 3, the decoder chassis **144** includes a fiber channel interface **288**, the depacketizer **316**, the decoder controller or CPU **312**, the image decryptor/decompressor **320**, the audio decryptor/decompressor **324**, and the cryptographic smart card **328**. The decoder chassis **144** is a secure, self-contained chassis that also houses the encryption smart card **328** interface, internal power supply and/or regulation, cooling fans (as necessary), local control panel, and external interfaces. The local control panel may use any of various known input devices such as a membrane switch flat panel with embedded LED indicators. The local control panel typically uses or forms part of a hinged access door to allow entry into the chassis interior for service or maintenance. This door has a secure lock to prevent unauthorized entry, theft, or tampering of the system. During installation, the smart card **328** containing the encryption keying information (the auditorium specific key) is installed inside the decoder chassis **144**, secured behind the locked front panel. The cryptographic smart card slot is accessible only inside the secured front panel. The YIQ signal output from the image decryptor/decompressor **320** to the projector **148** is connected securely within the decoder chassis **144** in such a way that the YIQ signals cannot be accessed while the decoder chassis **144** is mounted to the projector housing. Security interlocks may be used to prevent operation of the decoder **144** when it is not correctly installed to the projector **148**.

[0099] The sound system **152** presents the audio portion of a program on the theater's speakers. Preferably, the sound system **152** receives up to 12 channels of standard format audio signals, either in digital or analog format, from the audio decryptor/decompressor **324**.

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[0100] Alternatively, the playback module **140** and the decoder **144** may be integrated into a single playback-decoder unit **132**. Combining the playback module **140** and the decoder module **148** results in cost and access time savings in that only a single CPU (**292** or **312**) is needed to serve the functions of both the playback module **140** and the decoder **144**. Combination of the playback module **140** and the decoder **144** also does not require the use of a fiber channel interface **288**.

[0101] If multiple viewing locations are desired, information on any storage device **136** is configured to transfer compressed information of a single image program to different auditoriums with preselected programmable offsets or delays in time relative to each other. These preselected programmable offsets are made substantially equal to zero or very small when a single image program is to be presented to selected multiple auditoriums substantially simultaneously. At other times, these offsets can be set anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, depending on the storage configuration and capacity, in order to provide very flexible presentation scheduling. This allows a theater complex to better address market demands for presentation events such as first run films.

[0102] The theater manager **128** is illustrated in greater detail in Figure **6** of the accompanying drawings. Turning now to Figure **6**, the theater manager **128** provides operational control and monitoring of the entire presentation or theater subsystem **104**, or one or more auditorium modules **132** within a theater complex. The theater manager **128** may also use a program control means or mechanism for creating program sets from one or more received individual image and audio programs, which are scheduled for presentation on an auditorium system during an authorized interval.

[0103] The theater manager **128** comprises a theater manager processor **336** and may optionally contain at least one modem **340**, or other device that interfaces with a return link, for sending messages back to central hub **102**. The theater manager **128** may include a visual display element such as a monitor and a user interface device such as a keyboard, which may reside in a theater complex manager's office, ticket booth, or any other suitable location that is convenient for theater operations.

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[0104] The theater manager processor **336** is generally a standard commercial or business grade computer. The theater manager processor **336** communicates with the network manager **120** and conditional access manager **124** (see Figure 1). Preferably, the modem **340** is used to communicate with the central hub **102**. The modem **340** is generally a standard phone line modem that resides in or is connected to the processor, and connects to a standard two-wire telephone line to communicate back to the central hub **102**. Alternatively, communications between the theater manager processor **336** and the central hub **102** may be sent using other low data rate communications methods such as Internet, private or public data networking, wireless, or satellite communication systems. For these alternatives, the modem **340** is configured to provide the appropriate interface structure.

[0105] The theater manager **128** allows each auditorium module **132** to communicate with each storage device **136**. A theater management module interface may include a buffer memory such that information bursts may be transferred at high data rates from the theater storage device **136** using the theater manager interface **126** and processed at slower rates by other elements of the auditorium module **132**.

[0106] Information communicated between the theater manager **128** and the network manager **120** and/or the conditional access manager **124** include requests for retransmission of portions of information received by the theater subsystem **104** that exhibiting uncorrectable bit errors, monitor and control information, operations reports and alarms, and cryptographic keying information. Messages communicated may be cryptographically protected to provide eavesdropping type security and/or verification and authentication.

[0107] The theater manager **128** may be configured to provide fully automatic operation of the presentation system, including control of the playback/display, security, and network management functions. The theater manager **128** may also provide control of peripheral theater functions such as ticket reservations and sales, concession operations, and environmental control. Alternatively, manual intervention may be used to supplement control of some of the theater operations. The theater manager **128** may also interface with certain existing control automation systems in the theater complex for

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control or adjustment of these functions. The system to be used will depend on the available technology and the needs of the particular theater, as would be known.

[0108] Through either control of theater manager **128** or the network manager **120**, the invention generally supports simultaneous playback and display of recorded programming on multiple display projectors. Furthermore, under control of theater manager **128** or the network manager **120**, authorization of a program for playback multiple times can often be done even though theater subsystem **104** only needs to receive the programming once. Security management may control the period of time and/or the number of playbacks that are allowed for each program.

[0109] Through automated control of the theater manager **128** by the network management module **112**, a means is provided for automatically storing, and presenting programs. In addition, there is the ability to control certain preselected network operations from a location remote from the central facility using a control element. For example, a television or film studio could automate and control the distribution of films or other presentations from a central location, such as a studio office, and make almost immediate changes to presentations to account for rapid changes in market demand, or reaction to presentations, or for other reason understood in the art.

[0110] The theater subsystem **104** may be connected with the auditorium module **132** using a theater interface network (not shown). The theater interface network comprises a local area network (electric or optical) which provides for local routing of programming at the theater subsystem **104**. The programs are stored in each storage device **136** and are routed through the theater interface network to one or more of the auditorium system(s) **132** of the theater subsystem **104**. The theater interface network **126** may be implemented using any of a number of standard local area network architectures which exhibit adequate data transfer rates, connectivity, and reliability such as arbitrated loop, switched, or hub-oriented networks.

[0111] Each storage device **136**, as shown in Figure 1, provides for local storage of the programming material that it is authorized to playback and display. The storage system may be centralized at each theater system. In this case the theater storage device **136**

allows the theater subsystem **104** to create presentation events in one or more auditoriums and may be shared across several auditoriums at one time.

[0112] Depending upon capacity, the theater storage device **136** may store several programs at a time. The theater storage device **136** may be connected using a local area network in such a way that any program may be played back and presented on any authorized presentation system (i.e., projector). Also, the same program may be simultaneously played back on two or more presentation systems.

[0113] Having thus described the invention by reference to a preferred embodiment it is to be well understood that the embodiment in question is exemplary only and that modifications and variations such as will occur to those possessed of appropriate knowledge and skills may be made without departure from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims and equivalents thereof.

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